RENOVA LIBRIS

LIBRARY
World Council of Churches
150, route de Ferney, GENEVA

oikoumene

background information

FOR CHURCH AND SOCIETY

August 1966 No. 37

LATIN AMERICA TODAY - GOD'S ACTION AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

II Latin American Consultation on Church and Society

(El Tabo, Chile, January 12th-21st, 1966)

Contents

		Page
-	A. dos Santos and L. Odell: Message to the Evangelical Churches in Latin America ..	(i)
-	Hiber Conteris: Chronicle	1
-	Reports of the Study Commission (Summary of Findings and Recommendations)	7
-	H. Borrat: Institution and Event; G. Pet: El Tabo Opens Up New Windows	15

Background Information is published six times in 1966 to promote ecumenical discussion on social issues. It is compiled by the staff of the Department on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches, but does not necessarily represent the views of the World Council or its staff. Background Information may be quoted only with direct permission.

Subscription 1966: $3.— 15s.0d. SFr/DM 9.—

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GENEVA - LONDON - NEW YORK

PREPARATORY VOLUMES

World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva 1966:

"Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time"

I. Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World
II. Responsible Government in a Revolutionary Age
III. Economic Growth in World Perspective
IV. Man in Community

each volume $ 5.50 45s. 0d. SFr/DM 22.—

The following studies on Church and Society questions are also available from the Publications Office of the World Council of Churches:

Statements of the WCC on Social Questions, 72 pp., 1956. $—.60, 3s. 6d., SFr 2.—

Dilemmas and Opportunities, 104 pp., 1961. $—.50, 2s. 6d., SFr 1.50

Abrecht, Paul – The Churches and Rapid Social Change, 216 pp., 1961. $4.50, SFr 12.50

Vries, Egbert de – Man in Rapid Social Change, 240 pp., 1961. 21s., SFr 12.50

Ecumenical Statements on Race Relations, 48 pp., 1965. $—.50, 3s., SFr 1.80

Christian Participation in Nation-Building, 325 pp., 1960. $2.20, 12s. 6d., SFr 7.50

Specific European Responsibilities in Relation to Africa and Asia, 16 pp., 1958. $—.20, 10d., SFr —.50

The Witness of the Churches Amidst Social Change in Asia, 19 pp., 1959. $—.20, 10d., SFr —.50

Church and Society Issues (Bulletin of the Division of Studies X/1), 22 pp., 1964. $—.30, 1s. 8d., SFr 1.—

Further material is published in other World Council periodicals i.e. „Ecumenical Review" and „Study Encounter". Studies on the following subjects are in preparation: The Struggle for World Community, The Future of Christian Social Institutions; Youth and Today's Revolution; Sex, Marriage and the Family; The Nature and Scope of the Race Issue; Religious Liberty; and Migratory Labour as a World Social Problem.

Full catalogue of WCC publications available free on request.

World Council of Churches, Publications Office, 150, route de Ferney, Geneva 20/Switzerland.

M E S S A G E

To the Evangelical Churches in Latin America:

From January 12th to 21st this year, we met - 75 delegates, guests and observers from nearly all the countries of Latin America - in El Tabo, Chile, to carry out the work of the Second Latin American Consultation on Church and Society. We represented 15 different Protestant denominations and various ecumenical and confessional organizations. Among us were found ordained ministers of the Gospel as well as a good number of laymen, theologians and sociologists, economists and educators, labour organization leaders, farmers, teachers and other professionals of diverse backgrounds.

The purpose of our coming together was to study the ways that God moves in the Bible and in history, and the responsibility that falls upon man as a response to God's initial and normative act. But we were particularly concerned with an examination of the form and concrete meaning which God's action takes on in our present-day world, in our historical and geographical setting, in the (tr.: Latin) America where we live and among whose people we have been placed to announce the unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Through the Biblical word we discovered that God's activity is redemption, creation, covenant, prophecy, message. We then had to enter into the complex knot of developments resulting from the process of rapid social change in Latin America and disentangle from them - like a new Isaiah in Jerusalem's troubled hour under the Babylonian siege - the meaning and the "signs" of God's redeeming action, convinced as we were that He is still the Sovereign of history and confident that through revelation and the patient uncovering of those "signs", God gives His church the norms of His testimony, the call and content of unbroken obedience to Him.

Thus we saw that in this hour of search and change through which the peoples of Latin America are passing, an unwavering responsibility exists for the church. We discovered that in the midst of the violence, the political commotion, the great phenomena of social transformation - population explosion, urbanization, continuous exodus of rural populations - in the midst of even more complex phenomena such as industrialization, economic decline, increasing secularization in our large Latin American cities, in the midsts of the evils which are now endemic on the continent - poverty, illiteracy, hunger, infant mortality, social injustice - which cause the tension and the agony of the searching ... in the midst of this confused hour, to sum it up, we believed that we perceived the signs of God's presence, and thereby the meaning of our mission and the concrete responsibilities committed to the church.

We believe that at a time when our continent is becoming conscious of the values inherent to its own being and its historical and cultural heritage, the church is called to discover the "signs" of God's activity in those cultural forms, thus making its life, message and witness appropriate to the needs and characteristics of the Latin American community; we believe that at a time when new forms of secular life are determining the basic attitudes and concerns of the dwellers in the big cities, the church is called to discover the possibilities of a "new humanity" in this process, announcing to modern man the changeless redemptive action of God in Christ Jesus;

..../....

we believe that the social struggle in which our peoples are engaged is fed by a stubborn search for justice in three basic senses: economic, legal and social; that the reason for this struggle is the socio-economic situation in our countries created by small national and foreign groups trying to defend their special privileges; and we believe that the church is called - now as in every historic situation - to identify itself with the search for justice in any or all of its forms, without failing to point out the fuller sense in which the Biblical word understands the concept of justice, challenging and surpassing all the others; we believe that at a time when ideological controversy is giving origin to deep differences among men, even among those of us who make up the Christian community, the church is called to rediscover not only the bases of its own unity in Jesus Christ, but also the ultimate foundations of human brotherhood and solidarity in the Biblical revelation of one sole God, Father and Creator of all men.

We return to our countries and the inner life of our congregations convinced that the task is only at its starting point. We find ourselves in the midst of a profound social revolution. But the only way in which the church can take a significant part in this revolution and bear the message of Jesus Christ to the new patterns of Latin American society is in the search for its own renewal. Without the indispensable renewal of our forms of church life, our worship and our message, without the search for a real encarnation in Latin American culture and society, the church will not find the road to the fulfilment of its unchanging and unique mission.

We know that finding concrete ways for the renewal of the church is a painful and difficult task, but we do not fear it. We receive courage in this search from Him who, "being in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 1: 6-7), and in whose Name "all things are made new" (Revelation 21: 5).

We are grateful to God for having enabled us to take part in this consultation. We feel that He called us together in this place, His Spirit guided us through our meditations and discussions, and now He summons us to responsible activity in the midst of church and society. And in grateful response to what He has done, we feel it is our duty to address ourselves to the community of scattered Evangelical believers throughout Latin América, inviting them in the Name of Jesus Christ to undertake with us the most urgent task of seeking to renew our own church and, with it, the society in whose midst He has placed us. And the merit and result from our labour will be His.

LUIS E. ODELL
Executive Sectetary

ALMIR DOS SANTOS
Chairman of the Consultation

AMERICA TODAY

GOD'S ACTION AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

On January 12th - 21st, 1966, the Second Latin American Consultation on Church and Society took place at El Tabo, a Presbyterian farm about 120 kilometers from Santiago, Chile. Its participants totalled 75 persons who represented 15 Latin American nations (all those in which ISAL has centers or work), and approximately 15 Protestant denominations, different Latin American Catholic movements, and ecumenical and denominational organizations whose radius of activity includes Latin America and whose specific concerns coincide with one part or another of the cluster of subjects with which Church and Society has been dealing up to now.

Background

The decision to hold this continental gathering had its roots in the now-historic Huampani Consultation (July 1961), which may well be considered as the beginning of the stage in which the Church and Society studies took on a systematic and intensive character. That first meeting at Huampani laid the bases and fixed the areas within which there was to be effected a deepening of the understanding of the Church's social responsibility in the face of what was called "the Latin American revolution". Nevertheless, it was plain to all those who took part that this was just the beginning of the real work of study and discussion, and that a mature grasp of the problem could be attained only at a second conference whose preparation and content should be assigned to the newborn Latin American Board on Church and Society (Junta Latinoamericana de Iglesia y Sociedad, now called ISAL). Four years of intense work by ISAL, through its Executive Secretariat and the various national groups supporting it, had to pass before the completion of a three-year study plan, and a good number of publications ("The Christian's Social Responsibility", "Man, Ideology and Revolution in Latin America", "The Social Reality of Latin America", the periodical "Christianity and Society", the "Latin American Letter") sketched the fundamental theoretical lines on the basis of which the Second Church and Society Consultation would be called.

Theological Bases and Goals

The basic topics upon which the conference was to reflect were grouped around three general objectives: In the first place, there was the attempt to consider the nature and function of the Evangelical Church in Latin America; its history, its determining characteristics, the evolution and critical transformation seen in its pattern and forms of community life; what were the historical and cultural factors that affected its nature and spirit, and what are the contemporary (and specifically Latin American) historical phenomena that virtually or practically condition its present situation (the secularization process, the social revolution, the now-predominant emphasis on the cultural adaptation of institutions in Latin America)? In the second place, it was necessary to review the Latin American situation as such, realizing that in the combination of political, social and economic tensions that make up the present scene, is found "the" situation or context in which the church has been placed, and therefore also the exact historic frame of reference for the interpretation of its mission and message. Behind this focus lie the theological presuppositions that, in a way, have constituted the basis of the work carried out by ISAL

..../....

and - perhaps - its specific contribution to the development of theological thought in Latin America. The core conviction of this theological vision establishes two poles or points of reference from which the church (the Christian community existing in a given place in time and space) discovers its nature and fulfils its mission; those two poles are the Biblical revelation and history. But not history considered as a human performance (the "objective spirit" of Hegel), but primarily as the process in which God carries out His plan of redemption. Looked at in this way, history is basically the activity of God, the God who makes history and thereby reveals Himself. History therefore is given a "telos", a finality, and the function of the Christian community in every situation is to interpret to the people of its day the meaning that belongs to the present moment in the light of that "definitive telos" (which is known through the Biblical revelation) and itself to discover the timely character of its renewal and the "forms" or concrete ways in which it should make its presence felt. In this perspective, history is converted into a source of revelation, and the Latin American situation takes on a normative character for the church "here and now". On the other hand, every concrete historical situation requires consideration for what it is in itself and demands the church's acceptance of the objectivity and autonomy of the historical happening. This obliges the Christian community, therefore, to remain obedient to its mission and to interpret the political and socio-economic facts and events of its time in accordance with what they signify in the totality of the historical process rather than - as has been the more common temptation - by the harmony or contradiction implied in those facts with respect to the forms of institutional life or social structure that the church has adopted out of a previous social situation with its corresponding "ideology".

In the third place, there was an attempt at self—interrogation concerning the specific meaning and destiny of ISAL as a movement of renewal and concrete expression of the social concern and responsibility of the Church. On this point, the expression "Church and Society", which was applied to the movement from the beginning, had shown itself to be, in the course of four surprising years of work, much more rich and global in its significance than what had been thought at the outset. The essence of the discovery was the insight that "Church and Society" represented something more than a particular sector in the concern of the church (the "social concern", which, is nothing new); rather, in the inter-relation of these two words the church, obliged to reflect upon society as a whole, has been led to consider also the totality of its own existence, from the forms of social service which traditionally were what it understood by "social action", to the forms of worship, the content of its message, the significance of Bible study, the character of the ministry and theological education, and the present-day consequences of its community nature. In this order of things, the fundamental problem that the consultation implicitly had to deal with, was whether ISAL would define its future character and destiny from the starting point of its original compartmentalistic conception by which "Church and Society" was seen as the expression of a specific and limited responsibility of the Church, or whether it would rather acknowledge (either implicitly or explicitly) the global nature of its mission. On the other hand, either of the conceptions had its correlate in certain forms of strategy. If the starting point was the compartmental idea, ISAL would need to make of itself necessarily the "arm" of the Church extended toward society, the

method by which the Church would seek to influence or direct the historical process in accordance with its own "truth". In the case of the alternative idea, ISAL would be conceived as the "moment" in which the church gains an awareness of the historical and social situation in which it finds itself and, moving out from this "discovery", performs prophetically with respect to itself (just as prophecy in Israel was the moment in which the people itself acted introspectively and called itself to repentance), seeking its own forms of renewal and the integral fulfilment of its historic mission. The grave risk present in this option, as it has already been pointed out, is that the "truth" which the church believes it has and in accordance with which it yearns to give a certain stamp to the historical process, may turn out to be a relative truth, conditioned by the ideological and theological elements with which the church was previously identified. On the other hand, by considering objectively the historical facts and acting prophetically with respect to itself, the Church discovers God's work and the meaning He has willed to stamp upon history, and its renewal becomes an act of service and obedience.

The Topical Plan

With this nucleus of basic aims as a starting point, the consultation adopted a discussion plan whose general formulation synthesized what was essential in the theological focus described above: "America Today: God's Action and Man's Responsibility". Within this broad theme, four sub-topics were defined: (I) An introductory one, in which the path covered by ISAL up till the present was described and a general analysis of the situation in "America today" was presented; (II) a theological Bible study on God's work in history; (III) one dealing with the areas or dimensions in which Christian responsibility is exercised in the face of the previously described situation in (Latin) America, including an analysis of the structure of the Christian community in the light of the secularization process; social justice and traditional society; political patterns; relation between ideology and faith; indigenous culture and forms of Christian life; the ministry of inter-American reconciliation; and finally, the ways along which the social development of Latin America may go; (IV) a group of supplementary topics whose study appeared to be important for an understanding of the total outreach of the church's responsibility in the present situation: the land problem in Latin America; the current population questions and their influence on development; and a critical analysis of the forms of social action and service of the church in Latin America.

To work out this ambitious outline of subjects, the organizing committee of the consultation enlisted the participation of a good number of theologians and experts, most of which were already familiar with the programme of ISAL and its basic approach to the concept of "Church and Society". Among others, the persons who made an especially significant contribution included Almir dos Santos (Chairman of the Executive Committee of ISAL and chairman of the consultation), Leonardo Franco (executive secretary of the Student Christian Movement for Latin America), Samuel Araya (director of the Theological Community of Brazil), Joaquim Beato (rector of Centenary Presbyterian Seminary in Brazil), José Miguez Bonino (rector of the Union Theological Seminary of Buenos Aires), Richard Shaull (professor at

Princeton Theological Seminary), Claudio Williman (economist and university professor in Uruguay), Pierre Furter (member of the UNESCO mission in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and educational expert).

Results

It is beyond the possibilities of this chronicle to analyze or even to summarize the results achieved by the consultation. In accordance with what was decided, they will be made known in two stages: by the publication in mimeographed form, with a limited number of copies, of the reports produced in the different sections ("commissions"), the message and general recommendations of the consultation, and later, by the issuance in book form for wider distribution, of all of the papers presented, the reports in their finally edited form, and the general account of the gathering. Meanwhile, advance mention can be given here to four aspects of the work accomplished by the consultation by which a first impression of the results may be obtained. In the first place, the addresses and lectures prepared by the guest speakers. It is not an exaggeration to assert that in the Bible studies of the Rev. Joaquim Beato (God's ways of working as seen in the Bible: creation, covenant, prophecy, incarnation and kerygma), as well as in the theological discourses of Dr. Miguez Bonino (Discernment of God's Work in the Transformation of the Latin American Church) and Dr. Richard Shaull (The Meaning of God's Activity in Contemporary Society), tracks have been laid for an understanding of the current theological debate and the character that Bible study is taking on in a sector (probably the most theologically "developed" part) of Latin American Protestantism.

In the second place, it is necessary to point out the intensity of the study carried out in the commissions, and the importance of the reports they produced. True, this work was preceded by a preparatory study in which the topics to be considered (enumerated in section III of the previous part) had been developed by select authors from among the consultation participants and brought together into a basic document for the consultation. Furthermore, the deepening of the study was helped by the opportunity that each author was given to present his document before the assembly, thus making possible a preliminary discussion of them. On the baiss of these introductory studies, the commissions completed an analysis of their respective subjects, concerning which, as a general characterization, we can point out: (a) the attempt to consider the given area of study in a "scientific" and documented fashion, with observations and conclusions based on facts and figures, over and above the empiricism that has been recognized other times in studies of this kind; and (b) the normative character that these reports assume, since in most cases they are not limited to a mere diagnosis but try to indicate currents and trends for future research. These two characteristics enable us to take for granted that the usefulness of these documents will transcend the special domain of what has been known until now as "Church and Society" and become an element of prime importance for understanding the thought and basic attitudes of contemporary Latin American Protestantism.

.... / ....

Finally, two other aspects of the work carried out by the consultation should be mentioned: the studies or topics that were worked out in parellel with the main group of subjects, thus increasing the knowledge and picture of present-day Latin American society (and in this connection reference has already been made to the significant contribution made by the advisers' group of the consultation: Claudio Williman, economics; Pierre Furter, education and development in general; Jether Pereira Ramalho, population problems; Christian Lalive d'Epinay, sociology); and the intensity and richness of the dialogue that followed the presentations and determined, in a way, the "tone" that prevailed in the whole consultation. If there are two features by which the plane of this encounter may be located, without a doubt they are the "polemic tone" and the rigor that marked the discussions in the sessions and the question-and-answer periods after each presentation. In this heated dialogue - a clear symbol of a bursting need for communication and searching - unfortunately not recorded either in stenographic notes or on tape, the spirit of the consultation was basically expressed. For the participants, whether active or passive, this lively dialogue, even though not set down in writing, will nevertheless have permanent effects. The spirit, like the wind - as the Johannine statement says - "you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes"; but its effects can be seen.

Prospects for the Future

What new vistas does this consultation open for the future of ISAL and above all for the Evangelical Church in Latin America? Although whatever is stated now can only be in the nature of a prediction based on individual impressions (strictly speaking, the totality of various individual impressions), on the basis of what has been summarized, certain presumptions can be drawn as to what this consultation will signify for Latin American Protestantism.

First of all, it seems certain that the very importance of the encounter constitutes an implicit demonstration of the preponderant role that "Church and Society" has played intthe current development of the Protestant movement and a real gestur of encouragement for its future. This leads us to believe that ISAL henceforth can be thought of as a movement of renewal for the totality of the church; an element in favour of this possibility is seen in the statement - repeated by several of the participants - that ISAL ought to set out immediately to develop an "ecclesiology", that is, a fresh and integral conception of the forms of life, structure and organization of the Church seen as a whole. This means that the "compartmental" concept, by which "Church and Society would be a name for a specific, isolated function of the Church, has been overcome.

In the second place, and as a concomitant result, the consultation seems to have shown the basic lines to be followed in reflecting upon the renewal of the Latin American Church. Here special importance belongs to the reports of the commissions that concentrated on the subjects "The Structure of the Christian Community and the Secularization Process" and "Indigenous Culture and Forms of Christian Life". Both reports, as has already been pointed out, are more than mere (repetitious) theoretical

contemplations of the subject; they amount to excellent tools for sketching the chief lines of immediate and future study of those questions.

Lastly, it may not be too venturesome to affirm that this consultation took place in a decisive moment in the history of the Evangelical Church in Latin America and that, in keeping with the theological concept of history that has been dominant in the labours of ISAL, this is not a chance happening; rather, it finds its cause in the dialectic and the circumstances that belong to the present historical juncture. In this sense, the consultation may amount to the most serious attempt carried out up to now by the Protestants of this continent to reflect on the nature of Latin American Protestantism, the "raison d'être" of this form of Christianity in a continent of Catholic majority, and the paths of renewal that lie open for the church to attain its maturity and fulfil the decisive act of "incarnation" in Latin America.

Hiber Conteris

REPORTS OF THE STUDY COMMISSIONS

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

COMMISSIONS:

I. Structure of the Christian Community and the Secularization Process

Chairman: Richard Shaull; secretary: Augusto Libreros;
Consultant: Julio de Santa Ana.

II. Social Justice and Traditional Society

Chairman: Washington Hourcade; secretary: Epifanio Marquez;
Consultant: Carlos Garcia.

III. Crisis and Revolution in Political Structures

Chairman: Mario Fernandez; secretary: Mauricio López;
Consultant: Leopoldo Niilus

IV. The Choice of Ways for Development

Chairman: Orlando Beattig; secretary: Jose Postigo;
Consultant: Claudio Williman

V. Ideology and Faith in a Dynamic Society

Chairman: Hector Borrat; secretary: Nestor Garcia;
Consultant: Christian Lalive d'Epinay

VI. Indigenous Culture and Forms of Christian Life

Chairman: Antonio Cesari; secretary: Gustavo Velasco;
Consultant: Waldo Cesar.

I. Structure of the Christian Community and the Secularization Process

The report produced by this commission constitutes a very full and detailed document from the historical point of view. In it are analyzed: (1) the secularization process in a perspective that is both historical and sociological, starting out from its theological bases; (2) the different Christian attitudes in the face of this process (rejection, adherence, responsible compromise); (3) community patterns, again taking into account their theological and sociological aspects. The last paragraph of this section suggests a series of concrete situations that can be taken as the object of reflection or models for structural changes in the Christian community of Latin America.

1. The search for renewal of structures that is going on in the Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Cuba, involving not only change on the local congregational level but a remolding of all the structures of

a national body. (This experiment provides for the formation of a national legislative assembly and three provincial assemblies to plan and execute projects that will make possible, in a simplified, functional way, the more active participation of the layman in the life of the Church. The national body will have a useful structure in this organizational plan, with enough flexibility so as not to become a "sacred bloc" that could not be transformed in the future).

2. The new experiments that are being conducted on the local congregational plane in situations where an attempt has been made to perform a task of community organization in the midst of marginal social groups as well as a service to these groups, thus becoming a focus for the life of those who form part of those communities.

3. What movements such as the Student Christian Movement or Church and Society signify, not so much as church institutions (which they are not altogether, although they constitute arms of the Christian community), but as suitable instruments for the renewal of the church.

4. The potential usefulness of "advance guard groups" placed in dialogue and permanent confrontation with the world, as a possible source for a new theological formulation. These groups will find out for themselves the methods to be used, keeping in mind the following guide lines:

- places or geographical areas in Latin America where they need to be formed.
- particular fields of activity: universities, trade unions, political circles, intermediate, neighbourhood and community societies, etc.
- organization: made up of specialists and persons involved in the field where the work is to be carried out.
- coordination: they should establish permanent contacts with other similar groups whose activity is going forward in other spheres.
- building up of the community: by virtue of their expected ecumenical integration, the groups should look to each other for community upbuilding, discovering new dimensions of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments.

II. Social Justice and Traditional Society

This report begins by seeking the meaning of social justice in the Biblical revelation and in human motivations, then proceeding to an analysis of the following points: traditional society in Latin America; traditional ideologies; concrete forms of the search for social justice; new ideologies in the search for social justice; forces of opposition

to structural changes; and finally, the prophetic task of the church. On this last point, four aspects are pointed out that are considered basic to what constitutes this prophetic mission:

1. To offer an interpretation of the historic moment in which we are living, in the light of God's purpose.

2. To reclaim for God's sovereignty the whole of life and human relations.

3. To proclaim the relativity and precariousness of political, social and economic structures, even though they may be intented to serve mankind.

4. To serve as spokesman and defender of the poor and those who suffer injustices because of the existing social order, thus showing God's personal concern for them.

The report says:

It is evident that for the faithful performance of this urgent and vital mission, the evangelical church must, through its members, be present on all the frontiers and battle trenches where the stuggle for social justice in Latin America is being waged. The church must know and suffer within itself the agony of the world; it must give to its members a sense of God's purpose in the concrete form that the testimony of these members assumes in the world (...) The social responsibility of the church, and particularly its struggle for social justice, lies at the very root of the message of Scripture and the nature of the Christian faith. Because of its identity as God's people", the church is called to show forth God's love to men with the same intensity as Christ does. The awakening of the church includes an attitude of humility in recognition of its guilt for not having acted in accordance with the mission that was committed to it. (...) God's will is not static; to the contrary, its manifestation is ceaselessly renewed, and in the present Latin American reality it points to the inevitable search for social justice.

III. Crisis and Revolution in Political Structures

The extensive and substantial report prepared by this commission begins by analyzing the factors of "externalization of the Latin American political crisis", in which two main aspects are found: lack of agreement between the formal juridico-political structures and the real exercise of power; and lack of channels in the present political strucutre that would give an outlet for the masses' growing sense of being unsatisfied. In the second part of the document, an examination is made of "the revolutionary context" in which Latin America finds itself, leading in the third section to a series of "final reflections". At the end of this chapter, the report describes certain "lines of action and attempted responses to different anxieties that preoccupy the Christians and churches of our continent".

1. The Christian will be active in politics, participating responsibly and creatively in the existing political parties and civic and social movements; where they are missing, he will seek to create in a responsible way, together with other men with like concerns and dissatisfactions, new organizations and movements where the situation calls for it. He will not seek to establish "Christian political parties", because this threatens the unity of the church and implies giving the sanction of an alleged Christian system of values to the political programme of a party. Nor should he fear to take part in groups or movements that call themselves non-Christian and even anti-Christian, for it is precisely there that his orientation, his perspective of the realities of human existence, his calmness and patience are most needed (Mark 2: 16-17) .

2. Can the Christian participate in the direct attack on the established legal structures (revolution) when there are no prospects of their being changed through the activity of existing political and social movements? (...) A realistic view of the problem should bring one to recognize that it is not a matter of introducing violence in a non-violent society. There exists the so-called "invisible violence" or "white violence", as well as moral, latent and daily violence that is impossible to eradicate from our society at this moment. This existing violence is already killing the Latin American man of hunger and disease and depriving him of opportunities for life. In this sense, violence can have the capacity to reestablish in our society an order closer to God's will for man. On the other hand, it is necessary to underscore the ambiguous character of any violent or non-violent act; whether we choose violent action "to be effective at this moment, or we choose non-violence to preserve our purity, we are equally guilty before God". In other words, neither violence nor non-violence is a question of "a priori" principles or standards without regard for the given situations. In this context, the immediate task of the Christian will be to point out and unmask the forms of invisible or white violence; seek its causes and possible remedies; apply those remedies with the least possible use of direct violence; study and employ the preventive mechanisms of every kind of violence. And, when at the end of all this he must take a decision for one line of action or another and he still finds himself unsure of his decision, he should remember that perhaps never will he have the absolute and definite assurance that his decision is the only possible one; he should therefore maintain brotherly fellowship with those of his brothers that have decided differently than he. Like Luther, he will submit to judgment and take refuge in God's forgiveness: "This is my decision; may God help me".

3. (...) There are moments when political action may be necessary by the whole Church and no longer by Christians individually or by a group of them. When the situation is such that the totality of political life has taken on and shown a demoniac character; when violence, direct or indirect, has let loose in apocalyptic fashion, the church can and must speak out prophetically, declaring God's judgment upon all parties, governments, systems and ideologies. True, it must not forget that it is pronouncing in the Lord's name a judgment that takes in all Christians because of their participation (actively of passively) in those processes;

that is to say, the church itself cannot consider itself exempt from this judgment. The church's prophetic attitude cannot amount to "neutrality".

4. Without a doubt, the most important immediate task is found in the area of teaching. This function, in the diaspora of the contemporary Church, should be exercised among non-Christians as well as among Christians. (...) The church should instruct its people concerning the social and political situation in the midst of which it lives; it should share this knowledge and its Biblico-theological understanding of the situation with those individuals and social and political groups that are concerned about the present social injustice. In a continuous and ever-renewed process, it will stimulate the study of ideologies and systems that seek to rule or gain recognition in our midst. (...) In this effort, which will be pursued through many channels, the church must be alert to the inescapable need for working with interdisciplinary teams made up of Christians and non-Christians; it must share unreservedly all its means and facilities and join its economic efforts with secular study agencies that are engaged in serious attempts along this line; it must furnish means and train persons so that the maximum mass of such information may be made available at all levels in the local congregation. It must remain alert to stimulate and orientate the new forms of parish and church life that appear or suggest themselves as a result of these contacts and dialogues. It will never take arbitrary action respecting institutional forms but rather will let them develop in accordance with the needs and the convenience that fit a concrete situation. (...) It will not claim to offer definite solutions but it will point out the limitations of suggested solutions, reminding everyone of the good that is sought and the evil that is to be hindered or wiped out.

IV. The Choice of Ways for Development

Beginning with a very exact limitation fixed already in the topical outline of the consultation, and a very illuminating technical exposé by the economic adviser, the report of this commission continued by analyzing the diverse factors that condition Latin American development at the present time, taking time along the way for a detailed consideration of neo-capitalism and centralized and semi-centralized planning as economic patterns offered by different streams of thought to stimulate the continent's development. In its final section, the document analyzes critically this choice of ways; and from it the following paragraphs have been taken:

At this stage of events, it is impossible for an underdeveloped country to acquire an impulse for its economy and a sustained development within the framework of a free-enterprise policy. The necessity of planned state intervention appears as an indispensable condition for its development. Because of this, the capitalistic pattern, even with its present characteristics, constitutes a totally inadequate pattern for growth. On the other hand, the continued existence in the neo-capitalistic system of traits and values that are negative from the human point of

view should disqualify it as a possible pattern in a long-range perspective. (...) The development of our continent should be sought, therefore, in forms of planning that recognize the role of man's enterprise in the development process but that at the same time permit an effective intervention by the state as a planning agent without whose presence that development seems impossible. (...) It would be fitting to acknowledge the dangers involved for man's liberty in the assignment of new tasks to the state's responsibility that would considerably widen its present functions. This is a risk that must be run if we want to face up to the dramatic choice between enlivening our economy or accepting underdevelopment and its consequences marked by sub-human life. (...) The chances for development, however, are gravely limited by the effects of domination byinternational imperialism. The possibilities for bargaining, price fluctuations, the behaviour of currency exchange relations, the control of certain sectors of the economy through foreign investment, its interference and political pressures, all present a clearly negative picture within which the development of Latin America cannot be dealt with optimistically if it is not done within an essential transformation process of the capitalistic system. (...) The hope for an essential change in this system, which could lead to its historical disappearance, in no way assumes its replacement by systems such as the Soviet socialist system, which represent new forms of human privation that likewise are bound to call for new liberation efforts. On the other hand, there is no known historical instance in which a system triumphed over the one that preceded it without accepting useful elements from the system that was overthrown. It seems evident that the world is on its way to better ways of living together and that the will of peoples to harmonize the idea of liberty with social justice justifies the hope for a historical solution that goes beyond the polarization represented by the present powers.

V. Ideology and Faith in a Dynamic Society

This report begins with an attempt to define the concepts "faith" and "ideology", pointing out that both ideas have as a common substratum historical time and space; in the second part four criteria are proposed that could orientate the future study of ideologies:

1. First, it will be necessary to establish a typology of the chief ideologies, including their basic currents, sub-currents and intermixtures, to serve as a frame of referencefor regional studies and then be revised in the light of these studies.

2. In analalyzing a given situation, we should take into account the historical development of each ideology, its adaptation or rejection of the process followed by economic changes, social struggles and modifications in the power structure.

3. In the light of these interrelations, the conserving or transforming significance of each ideology, its degree of political effectiveness, and the receptivity of the masses to its influence should be examined. In a society in which an ideological vacuum is perceived

because the existing ideologies are inoperative or lack appeal, an investigation should be made of the reasons for this phenomenon and how it might be overcome.

4. For the examination of the ideological complex, it will be good to distinguish, in the first place, between the ideologies that uphold the prevailing system and those that seek to change it. Among the former will be found blends and even little attempts to modify the existing situation; but in the great majority of cases, a common liberal inspiration will be observed. The most important task will consist in fixing their behaviour within the general outlines of liberalism and, as far as possible, their relation to the variants of this current in the contemporary world.

The report comes to its "closing point" with the following comment:

In conclusion, we wish to call atention to the fact that Latin America's ideological moment is integrated into the secularization process. This process is not moving along in a homogeneous fashion or a straight line on our contient, but in different stages and evolutions, depending on the regions. For this reason, we cannot speak of a single ideological answer for all Latin America. What should be common to all Latin Americans is a basic attitude in the face of the secularization process and our dependent status within the world economic structure. That is to say, the consciousness that man's duty is to locate himself within this process, not as a spectator but as an actor, not as a pretermined object but as a liberated subject, a fellow maker of history (Genesis 1: 28).

VI. Indigenous Culture and Forms of Christian Life

In this report are examined the traits of Latin American Protestantism as compared with the determining features of the indigenous culture of the continent; in the first part is given a Biblical-theological treatment, followed by a consideration of the anthropological and historical aspects of the problem in Latin America. From this analysis are derived four conclusions for Protestantism on this continent:

1. It is observed that the "classical" Protestant churches tend to evaluate their work in terms of numerical and financial success, buildings, institutions, and the prestige they acquire in society; that is, quantitatively, as a capitalistic-type company would do.

2. The introduction of a democratic conception of government in Protestant church institutions in the midst of a society accustomed to authority in religious matters, caused situations of cultural conflict (conflict between the theory that was introduced and the paternalistic and authoritarian practice of the missionary; conflict between a declared democratic theory and the use of techniques for the manipulation of opinion that resulted in a democratization that was apparent, formal and superficial; the conflict posed by the appearance of an indigenous ministry whose leaders are supposed to continue operating in accordance with the missionary pattern even though they lack the resources with which the latter gained the acceptance and response of the religious community).

..../....

3. It is observed that Latin American Protestantism has adopted, not deliberately nor by theological formulation, but through general acceptance, the "doctrine" of personal achievement in social and economic affairs, as a consequence of the inner change through faith in Christ. This doctrine clashes with the need for social solidarity that is required by the process of national development in which those countires find themselves engaged.

4. It is interesting to observe that, while historical and anthropological analysis brings us to confirm the diversity of the cultural situations in our continent, this brief outline reveals to us an impressive uniformity in the Protestantism of Latin America, which has managed to create a common Protestant sub-culture at the price of its isolation.

By way of conclusion, the report suggests the need to undertake studies of a theological and anthropological character of those Evangelical communities that consider themselves representative of Latin American Protestantism, in order to determine the following points:

a) The impact of the Gospel on Latin American groups.

b) The degree of participation of Evangelical Christians in indigenous culture.

c) The elements that are favourable or unfavourable to the culture adaptation of Evangelical Christians; the causes or origins of these elements.

d) New lines of thought and action, and new forms of expression, that reflect our real situation, keeping in mind particularly the contribution brought in by the Pentecostal movement.

e) The growing concern for the vacuum that exists in the Church's theological and sociological training for the fulfilment of its mission.

This is a preliminary report on the Second Latin American Consultation on Church and Society. The final document, in book form, containing the main papers presented at the meeting and the full text of the reports of the study commissions, will appear in the coming months and orders for quantities of it are now being accepted by:

I. S. A. L.,
Casilla de Correo 179,
Montivideo, Uruguay.

INSTITUTION AND EVENT (Some reflections of a Roman Catholic Participant)

The Second Latin American Consultation on Church and Society confronted me with the same key words that I came to discover in that avant garde encounter of the Life and Mission of the Church Conference held in Córdoba, Argentina, in July 1964, that is "revolution", "ideology", "secularization", "new forms of Christian community", "man's humanization" ... but this is not only a similarity in terminology. The programme of El Tabo was almost the same as the one in Córdoba; the theological assumptions co-incided with what I had heard one and a half years previously; even those great pending issues which commenced in the dramatic lacking of ecclesiology in Latin American Protestantism. It is evident that ISAL - and the SCM for that matter - cannot provide it by itself. But as long as it cannot be produced, I believe this to be the great barrier which prevents the "Christian" from moving into the "Christian community" or the "Christian Church". This is evident the moment we think of the Church as a prophetic voice which calls things by their names, the moment we observe these frequent tensions between Evangelicals of the left and their respective congregations, especially when these are of a conservative majority.

We have heard in El Tabo some individual voices saying that "a vast sector of the Evangelical Church does not recognise its responsibility in face of social changes" ... "ISAL is still an élite movement which has not yet reached the local congregation" ... "The scope of action of Evangelical Churches is neither the Church nor the community of believers, but society itself; it is in the secular city where we could find contemporary man" ... "It is in society, taken in its broadest sense, where God acts and where it is utterly important that the living Word of Christ takes form" ... "The patterns of life and the organization of the Church puts a brake or hinders the action of Christians in society". And again: ... "the Church still lives with outdated patterns and structures".

Aside from these single voices, I would like to pick up a sentence taken from the report of the Commission on "Indigenous Culture and Forms of Christian Life", sharply stating that protestantism came to Latin America inevitably wrapped in certain cultural forms produced in the countries of origin in a period when Latin America was beginning a process of transformation under the influence of economic and political currents of these same countries. Protestantism has made its own, though neither in a deliberate way nor in theological formulations, the "doctrine", generally accepted, of personal achievement, mainly at the social and economic levels, as a direct consequence of the inner transformation through faith in Jesus Christ. This "doctrine" inevitably clashes with the need - at the level of Christian "presence" in society - for social solidarity with those struggling in nation-building. "This conflict became more acute since the doctrine of personal achievement led the Church to the setting-up of a series of institutions which gave rise to a sort of protestant sub-culture, to a pattern of life encrusted in the national culture. The believers tended to isolate themselves and take refuge within the bounderies of this sub-culture. A typical case is the elaboration of an educational system, which runs parallel to the current system, making difficult any kind of dialogue with society as such".

.../...

This critique to the "striking uniformity" of Latin American Protestantism should go along with the critique to the assimulation of the "American way of life", which cuts across almost every Protestant denomination and which hinders the development of a Latin American Evangelical ethos.

This consultation saw clearly the need for the aculturation of Evangelical community and in my opinion ISAL is a relevant force in this direction. In this respect the El Tabo Consultation is a real challenge to the churches to awaken themselves to any kind of excessive institutionalism and to stimulate them to a more responsible presence in society. The decisive turn here is that ISAL has become a movement imbued with a broader dynamism of change in which the whole community participates in the struggle to social justice. ISAL, as the SCM, has had the courage to move to the front of ecumenism, perhaps lacking certain academic sophistication, urged by the need to share with many others, whether Christians or not, in the struggle for justice and freedom. But this kind of ecumenism cannot help depending on, to a large extent, the existing Christian denominations however hostile or indifferent they are to this kind of endeavour. "We cannot renew ISAL without a renewal of the mentality of the churches", was underlined in an open and frank discussion on foreign aid for projects and programmes sponsored by the Churches. Shortly before it was said, with reference to the strong political disagreements among Christians, that "there is not a divine reading of the signs of the time, but just a precarious discernment of it", that because of it "we should respect others' political opinions, even though they do not co-incide with our own". And again: "every action tending to modify the existing social structures has a political significance. To act upon the structures is to act politically. And this presupposes the increased politicization of the Church and Society movement with all the risks that it implies". How can we overcome the threat to the division of the Christian community? How can we continue to be united where differences of political opinions are present? How and where could we discover new forms of Christian community which could make more relevant the participation of Christians in social revolution? How and when the event could shake the institution so that institution could become an event in itself?

Prof. Miguez Bonino, whom nobody would suspect of demagogic concessions, pointed out that "ISAL lacks theological maturity and roots in the local community, but that in five years has done much than other movements in fifty years". This qualified praise could also be taken as a challenge. For this theological coming of age, ISAL can count, among others, with the stimulating work of theologians of the calibre of Richard Shaull, with the fruitful reflections on the biblical foundations of Christian presence in the world uttered by the Brazilian Joaquim Beato, and with the same Miguez Bonino who prolonged and deepened in El Tabo the main theological lines so lucidly traced by himself in Huampani.

For a more concrete job at the local level, ISAL needs a radical revision of its work. So far, through publications and conferences, ISAL has mostly remained at a continental level. In this respect it is rather surprising that even though this consultation was held in Chile, no discussion was engaged as to the political situation of this country and the current experience of the Christian Democratic

Party, now in power, pursuing a "revolution in freedom". Nor has anything been said on the FRAP, (the Leftist political formation in Chile), rallying forces with the party in power to bring about a much needed agrarian reform. The consultation did not say much about the crisis of the Organization of American States and the economic and military mechanisms which today prop up USA imperialism. For this, I think that El Tabo should be the culmination of a panoramic examination of our economic, social, political and cultural realities and that from now on the task of ISAL is to fully enter into the analysis of these Churches and these societies, in the midst of which ISAL lives the joyful, creative, freedom of the event.

H. Borrat

(Taken from MARCHA - March 3, 66, a weekly magazine from Montevideo, Uruguay)

* * *

EL TABO OPENS UP NEW WINDOWS

The consultation on Church and Society held at El Tabo has shown us more clearly the meaning of God's action through the Bible and through history and has given us Christians new insights for study and action. The Latin American Church is bewildered and confused not only as to her place in a changing and secularized world, but also with regard to her own life and structure. We welcome, then, the new vistas and guidance received in this meeting. In the midst of the great political, economic and social events of our times, there exists the signs of the presence of God and it is precisely there that the Church could be again an instrument in the hands of God and show the path of justice and freedom to the Latin American society.

It is indeed in the social struggle of our people that the Church is called now, as in every historical conjuncture, to identify herself with the search for justice in all its forms without failing to point out too its higher and broader meaning as seen in the biblical message. In moments in which the ideological controversy introduced profound differences between men, including those who participate in the Christian community, the Church is called to rediscover the foundations of its own unity in Jesus Christ and the ultimate ground of fraternal and human solidarity in the biblical revelation of only one God, the Father and Creator of all men.

.../...

After El Tabo, we are conscious that our task is only at its beginning. Living in the midst of a total revolution that affects every section of society, the churches are also influences by this social effervescence. Participating in the renewal of society she is at the same time endeavouring to accomplish her own renewal. The Church will not find the way to a relevant witness and service without changing her own form of ecclesiastical life, worship and message, without seeking a true incarnation in Latin American society and culture.

It is precisely at this moment that we should ask ourselves what this consultation means for the future work of Church and Society in Latin America (ISAL). One major pedagogical element has been the need for decentralization in the work of ISAL in order to better serve such a diversified and kaleidoscoped society which Latin America represents. So far most of the movement has been developed in the south, especially in the River Plate area and Brazil. There is an urgent need to develop other regions and for this the creation of regional secretaries is an urgent demand. These regional secretaries would then be able to carry on the task of study, leadership training and social action in a more relevant fashion and in a way that the local congregations would at last be reached.

El Tabo has also shown the need for small and dynamic centres of social studies which may serve the local committees on Church and Society and the churches in general with advice and information about projects of social action and service. All this would help to meet such problems as the need for technical knowledge in the elaboration of social projects, the distribution of foreign food stuff, foreign aid, political refugees, social and racial discrimination, human exploitation, hunger and sickness, alarming internal migrations, unemployment and illiteracy.

This task ad extra should be coupled with a task ad intra. ISAL should maintain its concern for the Latin American Christian community participating in the renewal of the life and mission of the Church in Latin America.

G. Pet.

* * *

(Note to the reader:

Conteris is Study Secretary in the Latin American Junta on Church and Society, Montevideo, Uruguay.

Borrat is a lawyer and a noted journalist from Uruguay currently reporting for MARCHA. He participated as a Roman Catholic Observer in the El Tabo Consultation.

Pet is the Secretary for Social Action in the Latin American Junta on Church and Society, Montevideo, Uruguay.)